

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DACCA 03002 01 OF 02 120916Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 /071 W
-----079895 121049Z /10

R 120510Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9275
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 3002

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BG
SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THE MECHANICS AND ATMOSPHERE

SUMMARY. THE MACHINERY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HAS BEEN SET UP AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IS UNDERWAY. THE RULES ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE GENERALLY USED IN SOUTH ASIA, BUT QUESTIONS REMAIN UNANSWERED ABOUT THE POWERS OF THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT AND WHEN HE WILL ASSUME OFFICE. AS THINGS NOW STAND, THE POWERS WILL BE THOSE PRESCRIBED IN THE FOURTH AMENDMENT TO THE BANGLADESH CONSTITUTION, I.E., A STRONG PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM. HOWEVER, ZIA HAS WAFFLED ON THIS AND HAS SUBSCRIBED TO A "SOVEREIGN PARLIAMENT" AS WELL AS SAYING THE PRESIDENT MUST BE ABLE TO EXERCISE STRONG LEADERSHIP. FUNDS BEING USED IN THE CAMPAIGN SEEM TO BE MINIMAL. ZIA HAS CLEAR ADVANTAGES IN PRESS AND RADIO, PARTLY INHERENT IN HIS POSITION AND PARTLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DACCA 03002 01 OF 02 120916Z

BECAUSE BOTH ARE LARGELY GOVERNMENT OWNED. HE AND OSMANI ARE USING THE NEWLY RE-ESTABLISHED ADMITTED RIGHT OF PUBLIC MEETINGS. OSMANI HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF THE STRONG AWAMI LEAGUE ORGANIZATION, BUT ZIA HAS SUCCESSFULLY WOODED MANY OF THE UNION COUNCIL CHAIRMEN AND MEMBERS TO ACT AS HIS AGENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ELECTION COMMISSION HAS SET DOWN WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED "TYPICAL" RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF AN ELECTION IN THE SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT. VOTERS HAE BEEN REGISTERED (A GOVERNMENT FUNCTION HERE) AND APPEALS HEARD, CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN NOMINATED, SCRUTINIZED AND PLACED ON THE BALLOT FOLLOWING APPEALS, AND THE MULTITUDE OF PAPER WORK OPERATIONS HAVE BEGUN. MORE THAN 45 MILLION BALLOT PAPERS AND 60,000 BALLOT BOXES MUST BE PREPARED AND PUT IN PLACE BEFORE JUNE 3. THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING AS THERE ARE REQUIRED ALSO SUCH ITEMS AS INDELIBLE INK AND JETURN SHEETS, AND EMERGENCY STOCKS OF EVERYTHING STRATEGICALLY PLACED. ALMOST 200,000 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES (CLERKS, SCHOOL TEACHERS, VILAGE WORKERS, POSTMASTERS AND THE LIKE) HAVE BEEN DEPUTIZED TO WORK AS POLLING PLACE OFFICIALS UNDER THE SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICERS WHO HAVE BEEN APPOINTED ASSISTANT RETURNING OFFICERS UNDER THE RETURNING OFFICER WHO IS THE SECRETARY TO THE ELECTION COMMISSION. IT IS THE TASK OF THE HIERARCHY TO ENSURE THAT THE BALLOT IS FAIR AND SECRET AND THAT THE COUNTING IS ACCURATE AND HONEST. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE USUAL RULES, PETITIONS TO THE ELECTION COMMISSION CONCERNING THE RESULTS WILL BE PERMITTED WITH A FINAL APPEAL TO THE HIGH COURT DIVISION AND THE APPELLATE DIVISION OF THE SUPREME COURT.

2. THE BALLOT ITSELF WILL CONSIST OF A SINGLE PAPER ON WHICH IS PRINTED IN BENGALI AND ROMAN CHARACTERS THE NAMES OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DACCA 03002 01 OF 02 120916Z

CANDIDATES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER ACCORDING TO THE BENGALI SYSTEM, AND THE SYMBOLS ASSIGNED TO EACH CANDIDATE (ZIA HAS A SHEAF OF GRAIN; OSMANI, THE BOAT ASSOCIATED WITH THE AWAMI LEAGUE) AND A SPACE IN WHICH THE VOTER PLACES A MARK NEXT TO THE NAME AND SYMBOL OF THE SFZQIDATE OF HIS CHOICE. BEFORE THE VOTER ENTERS THE BOOTH HIS NAME IS CHECKED ON THE ELECTORAL ROLL, TICKED OFF AND A SMUDGE OF INDELIBLE INK PLACED ON HIS FINGER. POTENTIAL VOTERS CAN BE CHALLENGED BY THE POLLING OFFICIALS AND BY POLLING AGENTS OF EACH CANDIDATE. THE LATTER WILL ALSO WITNESS AND CERTIFY ALONG WITH THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THE COUNTING OF THE VOTES. (WE ASSUME THAT ZIA AND OSMANI HAVE THE MANPOWER TO HAVE AN AGENT AT EACH BOOTH BUT THE LESSER LIGHTS MAY FIND THIS DIFFICULT.) THE REPORT OF THE COUNT AT EACH BOOTH IS TO BE FORWARDED TO THE SUB-DIVISIONAL OFFICER WHO WILL COLLATE THEM AND FORWARD THE SUB-DIVISIONAL TOTAL TO THE SECRETARY OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION. HE WILL BE USING RADIO AND TELEPHONE FOR THE INITIAL REPORTS AND HOPES TO HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLETE RESULTS BEFORE THE END OF THE DAY ON JUNE 3 (WE SHALL SEE).

3. THERE NOW SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT WHAT IS LEFT OF THE

MARTIAL LAW STRUCTURE WILL CONTINUE IN FORCE THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN AND THE VOTING. ALTHOUGH ZIA SAID MAY 11 THAT IT WOULD BE "GRADUALLY WITHDRAWN", IN CONTEXT THIS APPEARED TO MEAN DURING THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. MUCH HAS BEEN DISMANTLED ALREADY AND MANY POLITICAL PRISONERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED (SOME ARE ACTIVELY TAKING PART IN THE CAMPAIGN ON EACH SIDE). THE EXISTENCE OF A MARTIAL LAW REGIME GIVES ZIA (AS CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR) AN ARRAY OF POWERS WHICH HE COULD INVOKE, BUT HE COULD ONLY DO SO AT CONSIDERABLE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL RISK, WHILE ENTHUSIASM FOR HOLDING THE ELECTION IS LESS THAN ECSTATIC TO SAY THE LEAST, THE CONVERSE SITUATION CREATED BY A DELAY OR CANCELLATION OF THE POLL COULD LEAD TO STRONG AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS OPPOSITION TO ZIA
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DACCA 03002 01 OF 02 120916Z

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DACCA 03002 02 OF 02 121042Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 /071 W
-----080702 121046Z /10

R 120510Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9276
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DACCA 3002

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

ON THE INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS, WE HAVE ASSUMED THAT ONE OF ZIA'S REASONS FOR HOLDING THE ELECTION IS TO CONVINCE THE WESTERN

DEMOCRACIES WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO HIM AS AID DONORS THAT HE MEANS IT WHEN HE SAYS HE WILL RETURN THE COUNTRY TO REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT. IT WOULD, WE BELIEVE, REQUIRE A SERIOUS SITUATION FOR ZIA TO TAKE REPRESSIVE ACTIONS UNDER HIS MARTIAL LAW POWERS. NONETHELESS, THE OPPOSITION HAS AND WILL COMPLAIN ABOUT THIS POWER REMAINING IN ZIA'S PORTFOLIO AND THE POTENTIAL OF ITS USE WILL REMAIN AN INHIBITING FACTOR.

4. THE ELECTION IS BEING CONDUCTED UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF BANGLADESH WHICH INCLUDES THE CONTROVERSIAL FOURTH AMENDMENT. THIS AMENDMENT PROVIDED FOR A PRESIDENTIAL FORM AND PERMITTED THE SETTING UP OF A SINGLE PARTY (BANGLADESH KRISHAK SRAMIK AWAMI LEAGUE - BAKSAL). THE LATTER PROVISION HAS BEEN SET ASIDE BY MARTIAL LAW ACTION BUT THE FORMER CONTINUES. THIS STATES THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE CHOSEN BY DIRECT ELECTION
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DACCA 03002 02 OF 02 121042Z

(EXCEPT FOR THE FIRST PERSON UNDER THE AMENDMENT) FOR A TERM OF FIVE YEARS "FROM THE DATE ON WHICH HE ENTERS HIS OFFICE." THERE HAS, SO FAR, BEEN NO PRONOUNCEMENT AS TO THE DATE THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT WILL ENTER HIS POSITION. AS THE RULES NOW STAND, THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL ASSUME THE POWERS PRESCRIBED BY THE FOURTH AMENDMENT AND BECOME AN EXECUTIVE HEAD OF STATE. THE ISSUE, HOWEVER, IS CLOUDED AS ZIA HAS SPOKEN OF A PRESIDENT WHO EXERCISES LEADERSHIP BUT AT THE SAME TIME HAS DECLARED HIS SUPPORT FOR A SOVEREIGN PARLIAMENT. THE CONTRADICTIONS ARE OBVIOUS AND HAVE NOT YET BEEN REMOVED. AND THEY MAY WELL NOT BE FOR SOME TIME.

5. THE POLITICAL PARTIES REGULATION HAS BEEN AMENDED TO PERMIT ALMOST ALL OF THE USUAL ACTIVITIES EXCEPT THE LAUNCHING OF PROCESSIONS THROUGH THE STREETS. THE RESTRICTION WHICH PERMITTED ONLY INDOOR MEETINGS HAS BEEN LIFTED AND REGULAR FIXED-PLACE RALLIES ARE ALLOWED AND HAVE BEEN USED BY MOST CANDIDATES ALREADY. TWO PARTIES REMAINED BANNED, THE DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY, BUT SEVERAL LEADERS OF THE FORMER ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR ZIA AND MONI SINGH OF THE LATTER IS ACTIVE FOR OSMANI. THUS THE ORGANIZATIONS ARE BANNED, BUT NOT THE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE MEMBERS.

6. THE CONTROLS ON THE PRESS REMAIN, BUT ARE BEING HONORED IN THE BREACH WITH STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CONTESTANTS BEING FULLY REPORTED. HOWEVER, AS MANY OF THE LEADING DAILIES (WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF ITTEFAQ WHICH, SO FAR, HAS DECIDED TO OPPOSE THE POLL AND SUPPORT NO CANDIDATE) ARE OWNED BY THE GOVERNMENT, THE COVERAGE HAS BEEN SLANTED VERY MUCH IN FAVOR OF ZIA. IN LAYING OUT THE FRONT PAGE AND IN PRINTING PHOTOGRAPHS THIS HAS BEEN

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DACCA 03002 02 OF 02 121042Z

EVIDENT, ALTHOUGH OSMANI IS GETTING REGULAR FRONT PAGE COVERAGE. RADIO AND TELEVISION APPEAR TO BE GIVING MORE BALANCED COVERAGE, ALTHOUGH THE STORY ON ZIA ALMOST ALWAYS IS RUN FIRST.

7. THE PRESIDENT, AS PRESIDENT, HAS A NUMBER OF ADVANTAGES OVER OTHER CANDIDATES. HE IS PROVIDED WITH SECURITY PROTECTION WHICH EXCEEDS THAT ROUTINELY PROVIDED AT PUBLIC MEETINGS OF OTHER CANDIDATES. WE ARE TOLD, HOWEVER, THAT HIS CAMPAIGN TRAVEL IS BEING COVERED BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL FUNDS AS IS THE SO FAR QUIET LIMITED PRINTING OF POSTERS. WE HAVE NO DEFINITIVE INFORMATION ON THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF EITHER OSMANI OR ZIA BUT THE COST OF RUNNING AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN BANGLADESH IS NOT INORDINATELY HIGH. UNPAID AND VOLUNTARY WORKERS ARE REQUIRED. IN THIS OSMANI MAY HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OVER ZIA AS HE CAN CALL ON THE AWAMI LEAGUE ORGANIZATION WHICH IS REPUTEDLY STILL THE STRONGEST IN THE COUNTRY. ZIA'S LOCAL WORKERS ARE DRAWN FROM THE MUSLIM LEAGUE (NOT NEARLY SO STRONG), THE SMALLER PARTIES AND THE NUMBERS OF THE UNION COUNCILS, MANY OF WHOM HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY WOODED BY ZIA SINCE THERE ELECTION LAST YEAR. THE GENERAL LACK OF ENTHUSIASM AND THE WIDE BELIEF THAT ZIA WILL WIN IN ANY EVENT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE LOW COST OF CAMPAIGNING. IT IS REPORTED THAT A NUMBER OF PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN ARE CONTRIBUTING SMALL SUMS TO THE MAJOR CANDIDATES, SOME, NO DOUBT, WORKING ON BOTH SIDES.

8. IN SUM, THE MECHANICAL ASPECTS OF THE ELECTION SEEM WELL IN HAND. THE EXPERIENCE IS NOT A NEW ONE AND THE HISTORICAL PATTERNS ARE BEING FOLLOWED. MARTIAL LAW WILL PERHAPS INHIBIT THE COPPONENTS OF ZIA, ALTHOUGH THERE IS LITTLE SIGN THAT THIS IS PREVENTING A GENUINE CONTEST. MORE CONFUSING IS THE NATURE OF THE OFFICE TO WHICH THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL BE ELECTED. ZIA, OF COURSE, STARTS WITH THE ADVANTAGE OF AN INCUMBENT, BUT OSMANI SEEMS TO HAVE A BETTER POTENTIAL IN THE PARTY ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DACCA 03002 02 OF 02 121042Z

HIM. THIS APPEARS TO BE A CONTEST IN WHICH THE MAJOR POLITICAL FORCES (LESS THOSE LIKE ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO STAY OUT) ARE ENGAGED.

SCHNEIDER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DACCA03002
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780201-1195
Format: TEL
From: DACCA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780566/aaaacdoo.tel
Line Count: 276
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f4e116a0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2710975
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THE MECHANICS AND ATMOSPHERE SUMMARY. THE MACHINERY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HAS BEEN SET UP AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IS UNDERWAY. TH
TAGS: PINT, BG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f4e116a0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014